

# via pacis

—The Voice of the Des Moines Catholic Worker Community

October, 2008

[www.desmoinescatholicworker.org](http://www.desmoinescatholicworker.org)

Volume 32, No. 3



Volunteers Jan Covington and Nancy Knox prepare a meal in the kitchen in Dingman House.

## A Gift of Self and Socks

by Nancy Knox

I have never been one to step up and volunteer for extra activities. In my home life three children precluded my actively seeking any volunteer assignments. There was a time that I helped with softball activities and always with fundraising for extra curricular activities for the children. This changed in the fall of 2006.

I had been casually dating a man who was associated with the Catholic Worker Movement. I had no idea what this was, but I knew it had something to do with helping those less fortunate than ourselves. We (the man and I) had been seeing each other for a few months, and he mentioned that he could use some help getting lunch ready. At the time I didn't have a job, and, since I could cook, I volunteered to come over and see what I could do.

I arrived and found out

that we would be expecting between 50 and 75 homeless guests for lunch. The lunch would consist of whatever we put together from ingredients found in the pantry and "whatever's in the fridge." We wound up with soup, pasta with sauce, some sort of salad (probably applesauce), and pies and cakes from Hy-Vee bakery that the bakery no longer could sell.

During the preparation and serving of the meal I learned many things—things that had never crossed my white-bread, middle-class life in the suburbs. I learned that homeless people had no where to get mail and no place to make a phone call. The Catholic Worker House provided them with both, and these provided a life-line to and a hand on the other side.

The serving of the meal was organized chaos to my unaccustomed eyes. There were guests signing up for showers. Guests are in-

vited to take a private shower for fifteen minutes on the days that the house is open.

One of the many services that the Catholic Worker House provides is a sock exchange. After your shower you can leave your dirty socks and get a clean pair. The volunteers at the House will wash the socks for the next guest to use. I think that this is a particularly moving sign of hospitality. Jesus washed the feet of others. The homeless spend many hours a day on feet that might be abused with disease or simply suffering shoes that don't really fit correctly but happened to be in the give-away bin that day.

On the day I was there for the first time, a guest had come out of the shower and asked for a clean pair of socks. The answer was that there were no socks for exchange that day. It broke my heart. It truly did. The guest had to leave with no

socks on her feet for the pair she had been wearing were no more than trash and couldn't been worn any longer.

During the day I saw the volunteers give away hats on their head because a guest needed one. They gave away razors, band-aids and aspirin. They gave away hope. During time there my first day I saw a lot. It opened my eyes to larger needs. I thought I could help. And I wanted to.

I found the sock need most distressing. When I go to my home I have a warm and safe place to sleep. I can turn on the faucet and have safe water to drink. I had food in the cupboards. I had clean clothes to put on after I shower. When I put it in perspective, I had it all. Everything I need. There are so many who don't.

I went out the next day and bought all the socks I could find at the Goodwill, DAV, and Salvation Army. I called all my family and sent the mission to them. FIND SOCKS. Find socks we did. I delivered several garbage bags of socks to the Catholic Worker House. It amounted to hundreds of pairs of socks.

But the need doesn't end there. It never ends. I have found that the homeless in the United States have it better than many people around the world. There are free meals and free programs. There are never enough socks. I never throw away socks. When I have mismatched or missing pairs of socks, I put them aside, and they make their way to the Catholic Worker House.

I have helped prepare and serve Christmas dinner. I have gone and eaten with the homeless at the Bethel Mission on holidays. It is one thing to serve or help in the kitchen but truly a different experience to sit and eat a

meal with the people you claim you are helping. Jesus ate with the unclean. Jesus fed the masses.

There are many needs that the homeless have. Plastic sacks from the store. To-go containers that you get from take out. Some of the guests take meals for people who would otherwise not have a meal that day. There are things that I would have thrown away in my previous life that I now take to the Catholic Worker House so they can help their guests.

Last month I found a donor to supply pork chops for everyone for one meal. It was a thrilling treat for the guests as meat and many other food items are harder to come by in the summer. Everyone thinks about feeding people during Thanksgiving and Christmas. But the need is there 365 days a year.

I have learned that when you give yourself, it is returned many times over. It is in the giving that you can make a difference for people—if just for a day. The guests of the Catholic Worker House have many needs. Some are homeless because of drugs or alcohol. Mental illness is also a problem. But none of that matters. What matters is that they need food. It matters that they deserve clean dry socks.

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*Nancy Knox has been a frequent volunteer at the Des Moines Catholic Worker for the past two years. Volunteers are always needed and welcomed at the Des Moines Catholic Worker. Join us during the hours our hospitality house is open or to help with repair, cleaning, and maintenance projects at other times.*

*For more information, contact Frank or Mona. Contact information is on page 2.*

## via pacis

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### Photos and Illustrations

Unless otherwise noted (or we goof), all photos and art are produced by the DMCW community.

### The Des Moines Catholic Worker Community

The Des Moines Catholic Worker Community, founded in 1976, is a response to the Gospel call to compassionate action as summarized by the Catholic Worker tradition. We are committed to a simple, nonviolent lifestyle as we live and work among the poor. We directly serve others by opening the Dingman House as a daytime drop-in center for those in need of food, clothing, toiletries, use of a phone, toilet, a shower or just a cup of coffee and conversation. We also engage in activities that forward social justice.

#### Mailing address:

PO Box 4551  
Des Moines IA 50305

#### Bishop Dingman House (Hospitality)

1310 7th St.  
Des Moines, IA 50314  
515-243-0765  
Worker Residents: Mohamed Elkhandagawi and Frank Cordaro

#### Phil Berrigan House (Social Justice)

713 Indiana Ave.  
Des Moines, IA 50314  
515-282-4781  
Worker Residents: Frank Cordaro and Mona Shaw

#### Msgr. Ligutti House (Worker Residence)

1301 8th St.  
Des Moines, IA 50314  
515-280-1216  
Residents: Rene Espeland, Ritzi Hughes, Frankie Hughes, Ed Bloomer, and Norman Searah

#### Lazarus House (Guest Residence)

1317 8th St.  
Des Moines, IA 50314  
Guest Residents: Carla Dawson, Josh Dawson, Jordan Dawson, Irving Schroeder

#### Weekly Lectionary Bible Study

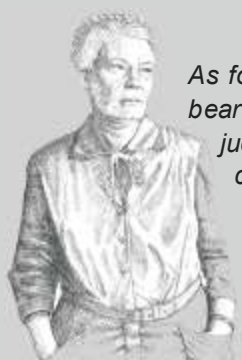
Mondays, 7pm. Berrigan House  
Call to confirm.

#### Weekly Mass or Prayer Service

Fridays, 7:30pm, Dingman House  
All are welcome!

#### The Chiapas Project

Chiapas, Mexico  
Richard Flamer  
flamerrichard@hotmail.com



As for ourselves, we must be meek,  
bear injustice, malice, and rash  
judgment. We must turn the other  
cheek, give up our cloak, go a  
second mile.

-Dorothy Day

## Sugar Creek Gathering Hits Record Number



Photo by Mauro Heck

The 2008 Midwest Catholic Worker Gathering reached record attendance in September. About 130 adults and 35 children came to the event held September 19-21, 2008, at the Sugar Creek Retreat Center near the town of Charlotte in northeastern Iowa. The Gathering is held annually in September and gives Catholic Workers in the region a chance to reconnect and share news about their communities.

The Catholic Worker communities represented were: from Iowa: Des Moines, Waterloo, Hope House (Dubuque), New Hope Farm (Dubuque), Mustard Seed Farm (near Ames), Strangers and Guest Farm (Maloy); from Missouri: Columbia, Holy Family (Kansas City), Cherith Brook (Kansas City) and several St. Louis communities; from Nebraska: Omaha; from South Dakota: Emmaus House

(Yankton); from Illinois: St. Francis (Chicago), Su Casa (Chicago), St. Jude (Champaign), St. Clare (Bloomington), Roaming (Rock Island), Growing Home Farm (Marseilles); from Minnesota: Winona, Duluth, and the newest Midwest Catholic Worker in Owatonna; from Michigan: Dorothy Day House (Detroit) and Kalamazoo; from Wisconsin: Casa Maria (Milwaukee), Anathoth Farm (Luck), Mary House (Wisconsin Dells) and Waukesha; from Indiana: St. Peter Claver (South Bend) and Bloomington House; and from Tennessee: Greenlands House (Nashville).

Round-table discussions included Non-Violent Communication, Living in Times of Change and Economic Crisis, Building Green Communities, Starting a Catholic Worker, and planning the Spring Midwest Resistance Retreat. (The Spring Resistance Retreat will focus

on the Blackwater site in northern Illinois near Dubuque, Iowa.)

The talent show competition on Saturday included a fine array of musical and theatrical performances. Des Moines Catholic Workers Frank Cordaro and Mona Shaw took first place



Football Mary

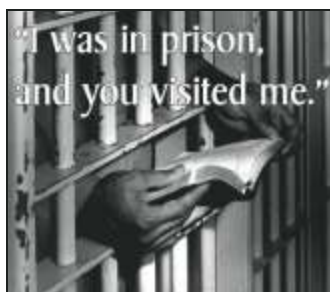
with a skit titled "Jokes by Jesus." Placing first likely had less to do with talent than the crowd's decision that it was the Des Moines Community's turn to host next

year's gathering. (First prize includes the assignment to organize the subsequent year's gathering as well as taking home for a year the coveted Football Mary statue.) Next year's gathering will be September 18-20, 2009.

## \$6,340 needed for new drainage systems on Ligutti, Berrigan, and Dingman Houses



Among the repairs needed after the summer flood, we've learned that three of our houses are in desperate need of new downspouts and gutters. We've been offered a huge discount for these from a vendor owned by a local Catholic family. The generous bid is \$2,620 for Ligutti House, \$1,646 for Berrigan House and \$2,074 for Dingman, a total of \$6,340. We will have the new drainage systems installed a house at a time as we raise sufficient funds. We appreciate any help you can give for this. Be sure to note on your check to the DMCW that your donation is for our new drainage systems.



## Prisoner visiting program seeks economy car

Frequent volunteer and former Des Moines Catholic Worker, Bill Petsche is organizing a ride-share program for those wishing to visit inmates at the Iowa State Correctional Facility in Fort Dodge. While there are ride-shares to other state penitentiaries, this is the program that travels from Des Moines to the Fort Dodge facility. To make the trip affordable, the program needs a vehicle with relatively good gas mileage. If you have a car you can donate to this project, contact Bill Petsche at 515-867-4117.

There is a wealth of information on our web site including a Calendar of Events, recent news, photos, and videos. Check it often.





# Community News

by Mona Shaw



Flipping pancakes at Sugar Creek.

The past quarter, for us, has been a blessed time of transition, introspection, and rededication to our work. We are delighted to welcome the newest members of our community, Renee Espeland and her beautiful daughters, Ritzi and Frankie Hughes. Renee and her family are long-time friends of the Des Moines Catholic Worker community, and it's fantastic to have them living with us. Renee has been painting up a storm in Ligutti House and has given the house a bright and cheerful face-lift.

Frank has been busy organizing actions at Offutt Air Force Base in Omaha

and will be intensely involved in organizing the Midwest Resistance Retreat that will take place next spring near the Blackwater site in northern Illinois. Frank is frequently sought to speak around the country on war and peace. Few, I've met, can tell the story of non-violent resistance as passionately as Frank.

The ubiquitous Eddie Bloomer continues to work non-stop serving our guests, joining peace vigils every week, and attending his ministry to prisoners. Ed was one of those arrested in late July for attempting to make a citizen's arrest on Karl Rove.

When Norm isn't digging weeds from between the bricks on our property and sweeping up the entire neighborhood, he is traveling and has spent time visiting his family in Massachusetts and visiting Catholic Worker communities in New York.

Mohammed has been observing Ramadan, which



Sean Reese (far right) and friends at one of their famous cookouts in the backyard of Dingman House.

also means exquisite food brought home to us and our guests from evening feasts at the Mosques.

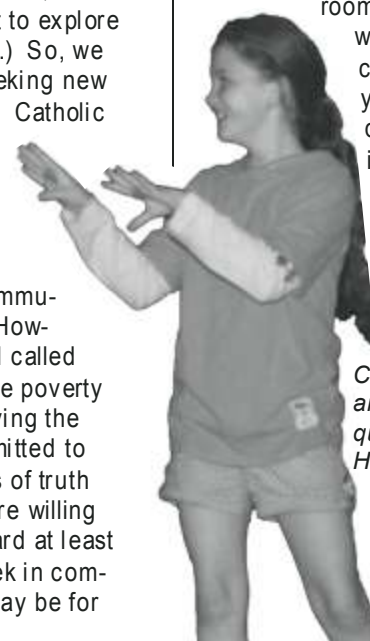
For me, the most meaningful event was being with my father on his 80th birthday. It was his last birthday in his home. My family has decided the time has come for him to live in a nursing home, and while we are clear and at peace with this decision, it has been profoundly sad for us as well, because we love each other so much. We ask for your prayers.

Perhaps the most encouraging news for our community is the enthusiasm and heart of the many new volunteers that have come our way recently. Kenna, Jan, Dan, Iowa State Students, Simpson students as well as other college and high school groups and others have shown us again that there are those who give for the sake of giving. We also continue to relish the spirits of returning volunteers like Nancy, Tracy, Courtney, Professor Mary Pope's ethics class as well as former DMCW members Tom Schmidt and Bill Petsche. All have been invaluable in keeping things going. A

particularly popular volunteer effort has been the outdoor cookouts organized a few times a month by Sean Reese from HyVee. We and our guests eat well thanks to them and the many churches, families, and other community groups who bring prepared meals to us on a regular basis and have been doing so for years.

Our community member number is somewhat down now. (Fran and Mike Fuller have moved to the Catholic Worker in Waterloo and closer to the new grandchild they are expecting soon. Halsey, Kirk, and Jacob have left to explore other life paths.) So, we are actively seeking new folks to join us. Catholic Worker community life isn't for everyone, and our standards for those living in our community are high. However, if you feel called to live below the poverty level while serving the poor, are committed to living principles of truth and integrity, are willing to work very hard at least 25 hours a week in community life, it may be for

you. You don't have to be a Catholic, or even a Christian, or subscribe to any theological belief for that matter. You do have to believe in serving first those among us with the least. And, while you don't have to personally engage in civil disobedience, you have to believe in and be supportive of those who do. Our four non-negotiable ideologies are to do our best toward 1. unconditional love, 2. unlimited forgiveness, 3. radical egalitarianism, and 4. always work from the bottom up. Des Moines Catholic Workers are not paid a salary but receive room and board while living in community. If you have questions or interest, contact any community member.



Catholic Worker and dancing queen, Frankie Hughes.



The Lady of Immaculate Heart Church is one of many groups that donate and serve an evening meal each month for our guests.



## Norman's Whereabouts

By Norman Searah

Can we go back to the village we started from? I don't know. Do you? We live in a complex world today. Everything is based on money. Even the simplest things in life. We have sold our minds and bodies to the world, and, even our souls. We have brought shame to us in body and mind, and to the Earth, we call home. While, there may be a few exception, the movies are full of what is wrong with our world. Some films do bring us some truths. These tell of our past, present, and future. They are religious and non-religious. One movie was only about women showing off their bodies as if they were selling them to the highest bidder. I recall that used to do that in our past, and it was called slavery.

I sometimes think that if I died today that there would be more than just the Ten Commandments and my sins. I'm a modern person. I believe the Ten Commandments were drawn up mostly for the situations of the past.

At that time if you read your history, there were a lot of Gods for a lot of reasons. There were even Gods who directed evil like sinning and killing.

I believe that there must be more than the commandments. I could be wrong. But we have more crime than ever. War is more like a business. It is more to heal a person than to kill one. And if it's cheap to kill one person, why not kill more? Why not a lot more?

So we created weapons of mass destruction. We did this instead of talking to

each other and sharing with each other. We would never take the time to learn the language of those we kill before we kill them. We torture people for what they know and what they might know. No matter what side you take, the innocent die. They die for no reason. And like in the past, we still steal from the dead.

We play war unfairly. We often support both sides of foreign wars so we can make money from selling arms and weapons. I hate war, all war. Nothing good comes out of war. Nothing.

It looks to me as if we all wish to be rich and famous at any price. No matter if we have to lie, cheat, or steal. We could be honest, but we'd need to learn how again and work at it. But instead it's "Buy, buy baby. Let's go to the horse track

or casino and bet all our money; and let's get rich. So rich, that we can keep up with and even go past our neighbor."

What happened to us? Weren't we children in a sand box just a little while ago? Did we care then about the color of or the language spoken by or the riches of our playmates? Why do we care about those things now?

I keep imagining God visiting Earth and seeing what we've done to the place and each other. He or she would be amazed I think. If I die before such a visit from God, I mean to confess my sins and all the sins committed in our day and then beg God to come here and help us. It's overdue.

I went to the National Catholic Worker gathering in Worcester, Massachu-

setts, which is also where I'm from. Michael Boover and those he works with did well. I thank you Michael for taking me home. I spent a lot of time with my mother, brothers, and sister. I was kind of sorry about the weather with the rain, thunderstorms, tornadoes, and flooding. It was like being back in Iowa.

I'm going to have my own page on the DMCW website. Check it out on the "About Us" page.





# 75th Anniversary Catholic Worker Gathering Draws 500



by Frank Cordaro

**T**he largest gathering of Catholic Workers ever took place this past July in Worcester, Massachusetts, to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the CW movement with close to 500 in attendance. A web page was set up by the folks in Worcester that covers the event is at [www.pieandcoffee.org/cw2008/](http://www.pieandcoffee.org/cw2008/) with links to photos, audio and videos of major talks and interviews, news articles written about the gathering and a full schedule of the gatherings main talks, workshops and worship services. Huge thank-you/s to the Worcester Catholic Worker communities—the Annunciation Catholic Worker House, the Mustard Seed, Emma House and the Saints Francis and Therese House—and all their friends and supporters in the Worcester area who made it happen. A good and holy time was had by all!

A highlight for us from the Des Moines Catholic Worker was listening to Norman Searah's entertaining entry in the Gathering's Saturday night talent show. Norm did a stand-up routine, a travel-

logue of the many cities and villages of his home state of Massachusetts

The greatest privilege for me was being on the "Panel on Peacemaking" with Bishop Thomas Gumbleton and Claire Schaeffer-Duffy of the Saints Francis and Therese Catholic Worker House in Worcester. Along with all the other great workshops and talks, we, the DMCW folks offered a workshop on "How to make a Catholic Worker community LGBT affirming."

Our own Mona Shaw, in a labor of love, joined a few others generous souls who drafted the Gathering's public statement to the Church and Nation at this critical time in history. (See the statement, later affirmed in full assembly, on the right.) Thank you Mona, you done us proud.

Mostly though, dear friends, the gathering was like a large family reunion of the Catholic Worker tribe, where old and new friends spent some quality time sharing the stories of our lives in a movement that is trying to carry on the vision and legacy of our founders Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. In these post-Dorothy Day years, the movement she and Peter began is far from dead. In fact, if the number of young adults and children in attendance is any indicator, its best years are still ahead.

Claire Schaeffer-Duffy (left) and Bishop Thomas Gumbleton (below) speak on a panel on "Peacemaking."



Photo by Mike Benedetti

Historian Robert Ellsberg (below) speaks on the diaries of Dorothy Day.



Photo by Mike Benedetti

A conference organizer, Christine Lavalée (right) welcomes people at the registration desk.



Photo by Mike Benedetti



Photo by Mike Benedetti

## CATHOLIC WORKER 75<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY STATEMENT

### Summary Version

**W**e are Catholic Workers from communities throughout the U.S. and Europe who have come to Worcester, Massachusetts, to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Catholic Worker. At this critical point in history, as we face unending war, including U.S. plans to attack Iran, ecological destruction and economic collapse, we call on our church and nation to join us in repenting our affronts to God.

The U.S. has become the wealthiest nation on earth at the price of the collective loss of our souls through our acceptance of the sins of war, torture, racism, discrimination, killing, nuclearism and environmental destruction—all in the name of profit. We live a lifestyle that demands war and distracts from our true calling of loving and caring for one another.

We urge our church to heed the nonviolent example of Dorothy Day and the critique of modern war by Vatican II. We once again implore the leadership of the Catholic Church in the United States, now and without evasion, to break its silence and to wield the authority provided by the nonviolent gospel of Jesus Christ, by calling the entire nation to repent for the war crimes we have committed in the so-called War on Terror.

When our body issued its last national plea in 2006, the response was profoundly disappointing and no less than tragic. The U.S. Catholic Bishops merely stated that "our nation's military forces should remain in Iraq only as long as their presence contributes to a responsible transition." The insufficiency of this response has been demonstrated, not only by the continuation of these wars in the face of a clear public desire to end at least, the war in Iraq, but also by the reality of US covert actions aimed at destabilizing Iran and the apparently imminent military attack on that nation.

Out of our shared and abiding love, we remind the Bishops that we continue to wait for their clear call to our nation to end these threats and provocations that carry no other outcome than an ever-widening sea of agony and death.

In the name of God, who calls us to love and not to kill, we appeal to the church and all people of good will to:

Call for prayer, fasting, vigils and nonviolent civil resistance to immediately end the U.S. military occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Advise all soldiers to refuse to participate in these wars.

Denounce and actively resist U.S. plans to attack Iran.

Embrace the nonviolent witness of Blessed Franz Jagerstatter and actively support and encourage all conscientious objectors.

Urge Congress and the military to offer appropriate care and support to returning soldiers.

Call for an immediate end to the use of torture.

Call for the closing of Guantanamo and other secret U.S. military prisons.

Call for the redirection of our resources from war making and exploitation to meeting human needs and preserving life on Earth.

Call for an equitable redistribution of resources and simplification of our materialistic lifestyle.

Call for disarmament and the abolition of all weapons of mass destruction.

**W**e call on our church and our nation to be a prophetic voice, a sanctuary, and a source of encouragement to those who want to work in community toward peace, justice and reconciliation.

*Affirmed in assembly:* Catholic Worker 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gathering

Our Lady of Mount Carmel / Saint Anne Parish Center, Worcester, Massachusetts, USA  
ON THE FEAST OF ST. BENEDICT JULY 11, 2008



Photo by Bob Fitch

For more on the National Gathering go to:

[www.pieandcoffee.org/cw2008/](http://www.pieandcoffee.org/cw2008/)



# The Chiapas Project

A Catholic Worker Community

[www.bishopruizproject.org](http://www.bishopruizproject.org)

Special Edition, 2008

*I* nstead of giving a rifle to somebody, build a school; instead of giving a rifle, build a community with adequate services. Instead of giving a rifle, develop an educational system that is not about conflict and violence, but one that promotes respect for values, for life, and respect for one's elders. This requires a huge investment. Yet if we can invest in a different vision of peaceful coexistence, I think we can change the world, because every problem has a nonviolent answer.

Rigoberta Menchu  
September 24, 1996

*Rigoberta Menchú Tum, is an indigenous Guatemalan, of the Quiché-Maya ethnic group and a life-long advocate of indigenous people in Mexico and Guatemala. Menchú became well-known after her first biography, I, Rigoberta Menchú was published in 1983 when she was merely 23 years old. Later she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992, the youngest person to ever receive the Nobel.*



## The Poor Are with Us

by Richard Flamer

*"Christ is there with us. What we do is very little. But it is like the little boy with a few loaves and fishes. Christ took that little and increased it. He will do the rest. What we do is so little it may seem to be constantly failing. But so did he fail. He met with apparent failure on the Cross. But unless the seed fall into the earth and die, there is no harvest. And why must we see results? Our work is to sow: Another generation will be reaping the harvest."*

-Dorothy Day

**T**he poor, like Angelina, will always be among us. Angelina works in a Youth Hostel on the weekends for 50 pesos a day (fewer than five U.S. dollars). Her husband left her some years back with a house of two bedrooms, one

of which she rents out on occasion though at the moment her four-year-old grandson is staying with her. Her two grown children have long ago moved away and can barely feed themselves, let alone help their mother.

Angelina was fortunate enough to be a part of a Japanese/Mexican program that worked with older women in an effort to make them more independent. She has now completed courses in "self-esteem," massage therapy, and herbal medicines. She tells us her favorite class was learning how to read and write. Araceli and Angelina spend countless hours at our house reading and writing. Last week Angelina came to us for something to eat. We learned that her son was not giving her money to care for the grandson, and Angelina was preparing food for the four-year-old and neglecting herself. Araceli went with Angelina to

visit the son at his home and got a promise of another 150 pesos a week. I wonder how impoverished my life would now be if I were not allowed to live among people who are starving?

Magdalena cleans houses, when she finds the work, and is mother to two school-aged children, Carlos and Lupita. They go with her everywhere. The hovel in which they live is too dangerous for the children to stay home alone. Since Magdalena must take her children wherever she works she has only a few clients and cannot work a regular job, like in a hotel, etc. Magdalena comes to our house each week to do the laundry and clean. She and her family live on the fifty pesos we pay her, along with the other two clients she has (who only pay her

*Continued on page 2*





## The Chiapas Project

**The Chiapas Project Founder**  
Richard Flamer  
flamerrichard@hotmail.com

Founded by Richard Flamer, the Chiapas Project is an intentional community located rural Chiapas near San Cristobal de las Casas in Mexico.

Influenced by his disillusionment during his U.S. Army stint in Vietnam, his subsequent years of photographically documenting the stark realities of war and poverty in Central America and southern Mexico, and the time he spent living in Catholic Worker communities in the Midwest, Flamer recognized the San Cristobal area in Mexico as a place of great need for works of mercy.

The Mayan people of southern Mexico are among the poorest in this hemisphere. Victims of widespread discrimination, high levels of unemployment, disease and malnutrition there is little reason for hope. It is here that Richard Flamer and his wife, Araceli have committed themselves to changing this bleak outlook. The Groff family; Jim, Pat and Chris as well as daughters Anna and Ruth have committed to help them in this project. They receive no monetary pay for their work.

The Project began with a shared vision when Flamer, Bishop Samuel Ruiz, and other area clergy initiated a community center with the acronym of SY-JAC (Service to our people in Tzol Tzil). Since its founding seven years ago, the Chiapas/Bishop Ruiz Project has supported and built the community center which now includes a day care center, a modest kitchen, and classrooms for adult literacy, sewing and carpentry.

The aim of the Chiapas Project is to live in voluntary poverty with others, to advocate for justice for the poor, and to be a prophetic, non violent witness against injustice and militarism. The work is to live as the Gospels have shown us: recognizing our failures, giving food to the hungry, clothes to the naked, building shelters, while seeking forgiveness from those whom we have wronged.

Together with supporters from throughout the world the Project welcomes others to help and work with them, in a nonviolent spirit that is their response to Globalization.

### Donations

Mail donations to the Chiapas Project to  
Holy Family Church  
1715 Izard St  
Omaha, NE 68102  
(402) 345-1062

### Information?

Email Richard Flamer at flamerrichard@hotmail.com  
or visit the website at: [www.bishopruizproject.org](http://www.bishopruizproject.org)

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## The Poor Are with Us

continued from page 1

25 pesos each.) Lupita caught a cold recently and was ill for a week until Araceli was able to take Lupita to our doctor friend, who wrote her a prescription for which Araceli paid because Magdalena could not. But, Lupita is better. Yet it begs the question of what happens when Magdalena gets sick? The last time (two years back) we took the children for four days while Magdalena was placed in the hospital. What about the next time?

Don Santiago works at our farm. He lives on \$72 a week with his 14-year-old daughter and his wife. While he owns two parcels of land, one inherited from his father, he cannot afford to keep his 30-by-60-foot lot with a small 12-by-18-foot wooden because of the levies imposed by his rich neighbors who have bought up the surrounding land. The levies, in lieu of land taxes, are to "improve" the drainage, electrical, street repair, etc. The levies were \$11,000 pesos last year (or around \$1000.) which he paid from a weekly paycheck of 720 pesos. We were able to give him some relief from this burden by helping him put in a small register and drainage so that he could connect his new place to the drainage in the community and give him most of the materials needed for the job. It's what neighbors are supposed to do, I think.

Then, there is "The Walker," a beggar who walks each day from a far end of the city past our house to the center of town where he begs each day. The walk is more than six miles each way. The Walker tells me he doesn't know when he was born, but he refers to his children who were born in the 1920s. Sometimes I walk with him in his stilted shuffle as he uses his stick to fend off passing dogs and other pedes-

trians. He is only about 4'6" tall but he tells me he used to be taller when he was younger. He won't take money from me as we walk. If I want to give him money for his begging, I have to wait until he is in his favorite spot at a traffic light in the middle of town. He persuaded a maintenance worker once to make to lengthen the time between lights changing so he could approach than one car as they waited in traffic. He passes our house at eight a.m. and again at 6:00 p.m. He tells me that he rises at 4 every morning. Sometimes I wonder how I can help him more. I realize each time he passes our house is another gift from God.

The "Guero," or white guy has an auto repair shop across the street from us. I have often had vehicles repaired at his shop, though why I keep taking them to him I do not know. His father was a German working man who fled after W.W. II to Mexico (rumors in the neighborhood suggest he had been a Nazi soldier) where he met and married a local woman. The children, all six, are light skinned and handsome, and all are reprobates... Juan Carlos loves Baseball, Beer and Women, not exactly in that order. He is, when he works, a terrific intuitive mechanic. As one would guess, he is an expert at German cars and loves good engineering. The problem is that when he takes my truck into his shop, it stays for weeks or months while he fixes every little thing that I didn't ask him to fix. This last time I took it in for him to replace two wires involving the pump for the gas line- he just finished the wires after two months, than told me I couldn't have it yet because he had taken the brake pump off to repair a seal; and, oh, by the way,



he decided to drop the front end down a little bit to level out the load so he had taken the "lift" kit apart to drop the springs down one inch for a better ride. His older daughter, now 15, has suffered greatly early on in her life, from malnutrition. She has to struggle harder than the other children around her to get good grades so that she can get a real job and marry a man who doesn't drink. The parents have learned from their first child so the new girl of two is doing well and is nourished. Though the family lost their son at five months, this last year. A virus, they say, though they are not sure since they took him to the hospital and neglected to get the medicine since they had no money at the time- and than the child just died, two weeks out of the hospital.

These are only a few of the extraordinary souls with extraordinary stories that grace our lives. Here at our little farm and in the city of San Cristobal de las Casas we are truly blessed. I am often frustrated with the concept of "results". Are we a good Catholic Worker? Do we live up to the standards of Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day? I know that these days I do feel the sense of "The Long Loneliness" but I have my love for Araceli to stave off the pangs. Are we doing the right thing? Comenius tells us that "The labyrinth is much more the norm than a guiding path. ■"

Richard Flamer (left) with Bishop Ruiz.

Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia was bishop of San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico for forty years. In that time he was a tireless advocate for the indigenous people of the region. He was under constant threat from the wealthy landowners and other powerful people who benefitted from maintaining the status quo. It is because of Bishop Ruiz's concern for the poor of Chiapas that our project bears his name.



[www.bishopruizproject.org](http://www.bishopruizproject.org)



## Why Dairy Goats?

by Jim Groff

**M**y wife Pat and I have been married for 37 years. In that time, on several occasions, we have had the opportunity to raise



Nubian dairy goats. We adore the animals for their beauty, personality and temperament. We have made cheese, butter, yogurt and ice cream from their milk and love its rich sweet taste.

Right now we have two milking does, Dora and Beulah that we milk twice a day. We also have three goat kids, Dora's daughter and sons from this year. We live on five acres in the Texas Hill Country near the small community of Mico. We also have fifteen chickens, collect eggs and make cheese. We take a couple of dozen eggs and some cheese to the Catholic Worker House in San Antonio when we can and give the rest to our neighbors and coworkers.

I read a news group called Nubiantalk where people who also like Nubian dairy goats post messages. One day a message appeared on the news group from a person in Mexico who wanted to

establish a dairy goat herd on his farm. He didn't get many responses

Richard Flamer and I began corresponding and discovered that we had two sides of the same vision. He wanted to create a foundation herd of Nubian dairy goats on his Catholic Worker farm, and I wanted to find a way to send goats to poor communities in Mexico.

And so the Bishop Ruiz/Chiapas Dairy Goat Project has been born. We will collect Nubian goats on our place in Texas and once or twice a year Richard will come up from Mexico and take them to Chiapas. The school that Richard works with will, using a Grameen Bank model, sell them to the local women who will repay the loan for the goats with the profits they make from selling their milk to a local cheese making coop run by a different group of indigenous women.

One small problem arose. Using the Grameen Bank model, this would make a relatively self-supporting system with infusions of new genetics from the U.S. regularly. After having thought out the logistics and the finances (a bit), we learned we had forgotten one small thing—namely, the animal import and export regulations. We discovered that Mexico has not allowed U.S. dairy goats to be imported for breeding purposes since 2004.

Why dairy goats? Dairy goats are ideal for ultra-small farming operations. They are only about one-fifth the size of a typi-

cal cow; they have a much less demanding diet; and they produce a large volume of high butterfat milk. The cheese made from the milk is in high demand. Also they generally produce two offspring a year, so a herd can grow rapidly. They can drop their first kids after only about eighteen months, and the excess males make an excellent source of meat for the diet of the family. The plan is to help local women establish their own herds of goats. By constantly bringing in new stock, particularly bucks, the quality of the herd genetics will be maintained. There is an existing women-owned dairy coop that produces cow's milk cheese that would provide a market for the milk from the goats, and there is local demand for the cheese so the women would be able to dramatically increase family income in a relatively short time.

So our plans have changed a bit. We have been able to find a source for high quality dairy goats in Mexico. The Project will raise money to purchase the goats for Casa de Camillo Torres farm. We will also accept donated goat and dairy equipment. Richard will build the herd from Mexican stock and will help the women establish their dairy herds the imported bucks have generally been too large for the local does with disastrous results at kidding



*Finn, (pictured above, one of our younger frequent visitors) waits patiently for supper to be served. Children are the heart and joy of the work of the Chiapas Project. From the Back-to-School Project to the many ways we help their parents earn a living; they are part of everything we do.*

time when most of the does died and few kids survived. We had an opportunity to see some high quality Nigerian pygmy dairy goats on the farm we visited. Not only are these animals good for both milk and meat, but they are almost exactly the size of the local goats in Chiapas.

So, we have decided to expand our vision to include developing a high

quality Nigerian pygmy goat foundation herd that can be used as a source of bucks for breeding with the local does to improve the overall quality of the goats in the region. It is a big project and we are just getting started on it. You can help. ■



## Join an Educational Delegation

**A** critically important aspect of our work in The Chiapas Project includes the Educational Delegations we host. These delegations are comprised of U.S. visitors who come to Chiapas and engage in a seven- or eight-day experience among us. We, who live here, try to expose the delegates to a sampling of our work and the lives of those with whom we work—the poverty, the great faith, the tactile aspects of building, and other complexities of life in Chiapas. When working with each educational delegation, we are never sure just who is educating whom. We can say that no one who comes to Chiapas from the United States leaves unchanged. Various delegates have written with great hope of their time visiting in the region but the very best works are those of the young people. Shana, at 13, is thus far the young-

est to come. Emily at 17 came once on the delegation and then came back to join us.

In recent years we have held twelve delegations, mostly small, but all packed with heart and enthusiasm. We can host a delegation with three or more delegates. The cost

is \$600 per delegate plus airfare and transportation to our site. The fee covers housing, meals, translators, and some transport fees inside Chiapas.

For more information, check our website at [www.bishopruizproject.org](http://www.bishopruizproject.org) ■



*Araceli Flamer, co-organizer and conscience of the Chiapas Project.*



*Strong supporter of the Chiapas Project and Des Moines, Iowa, resident Lois Crilley, and Des Moines Catholic Worker, Frank Cordaro have both participated in Educational Delegations.*

# Chiapas Dreams

We have many dreams for our community, so we present this project list for the Chiapas Project for your consideration. (Costs are in U.S. dollars.)		
PROJECT	COST	DESCRIPTION
Bunny Project	\$1,200	To build hutches with local welders that are raised off the ground (to protect the bunnies and to collect the excrement for recycling) alfalfa pellets, feeders, etc. The meat currently sells at \$5.50 a kilo, hides at \$3.00 each, excrement goes to our worm farm.
Worm Farm	\$600	To build four canals in concrete with a canopy overhead, 4 kilos of red worms. Using rabbit and chicken excrement along with coffee husks we can produce 100 kilos of organic fertilizer and 4 kilos of worms for each trough (using one kilo to start.) We give one kilo to a neighbor who pays us back 2 kilos after his first crop. Worms are selling at \$50. a kilo and are being sold mostly to coffee farmers who need organic coffee in this current marketplace. We sell part of the fertilizer (at 50 cents a kilo) but mostly use it for our own fruit trees on the land.
Back to School	\$360	To send a child to school, the money pays for a complete uniform, shoes, books, school supplies and supplemental food for the mother (one time) setting out a breakfast diet which can be subsequently followed.
Shelter for Migrants	\$8,000	We are three hours from the Guatemalan border on the Pan American highway and many migrants come to us for help. We are already providing short-term work for a bit of cash and food. We would like to build a dormitory and a small chapel to house as many as 12 passing migrants at a time.
Nubian Goat Project	\$10,000	To buy five milk goats (4 females and a male from five different families) to start a cheese industry with the local families. A secondary but important purpose is the bettering of the goat races locally (the goats here are badly inbred.) The money would cover the purchase of the goats, a trailer for transportation (around \$1200.) building appropriate housing and fencing and obtaining other cheese-making and milking equipment..
Workshops in Business for Two Women	\$5,000	These funds cover university courses and an internship for two women to learn accounting, forming a cooperative, how to open a bank account, complying with Mexican tax laws, etc. A year in school with each of the women reporting back to their cooperatives (One woman is from San Andreas, Larrainzar, and works with a weaving cooperative. The other is here in San Cristobal working with women in crafts and herbs.)
Woodshop in Simojovel for a Carpentry Cooperative	\$10,000	The existing cooperative works with the Zapatistas in reforestation and building doors and windows—among the 16 young men they have a table saw, a router, two hammers, one screwdriver and two chisels. The plan is to get them a combination of used and new tools from the US (most of which are not available here) and bring them into Mexico. Half the money is for import taxes.
Sewing Circle	\$350	To buy a new sewing machine and send two women to the sewing classes at Syjac for 8 weeks of training. There is a Singer Sewing machine plant nearby with parts readily available. In the past we have tried to bring machines down from the states with little luck as we can't get parts for them once they are here (plus we end up paying exorbitant taxes to import them).
Bakery	\$3,500	To buy and make wood-fired/solar ovens with a small building and storage for local women to make and sell bread. The women split two thirds of the money; one third returns to us for maintenance of the bakery.



Each Bunny Project provides a Chiapas Family with a way to have a sustainable and livable income.



Back to School



Members of the first carpentry class with their families.

Two BIG Dreams
A documentary studio to produce educational DVD's in the languages of this region from young people, i.e. send them out with video cameras to document their lives on film in their native languages to be edited at our center and shipped to SCOLA-TV in Omaha for broadcast around the world. We need about \$30,000. dollars to purchase the equipment, build a small studio, etc.
Establish a small construction company for local NGO's (such as Habitat for Humanity, etc.) but mainly for training young workers. \$200,000. would get us a tractor, dump truck, bulldozer, tools and around \$20,000. in working capital to build roads, small bridges into isolated communities, etc.

To make a donation to the Chiapas Project (for any of the projects listed or for our day-to-day operations), make your check payable to “The Chiapas Project” and mail it to:
The Chiapas Project c/o Holy Family Church 1715 Icard St Omaha, NE 68102 (402) 345-1062



Sewing Circle Project



# Planting the Seeds of Revolution



by Brian Terrell

**T**wenty-two years ago, more than a decade before the New Monasticism Movement called for “relocation to the abandoned places of Empire” but a millennium and a half after St. Benedict made the same suggestion, our small band of Catholic Workers settled in Maloy, Iowa, an all but abandoned little town seven miles from the border with Missouri. Our attempt to establish here what Peter Maurin called an “agronomic university” continues as a jumble of small failures and small successes. Our little community struggles in fits and starts to live where we are planted, trying to carve out gentler, more sustainable ways of living and relating to our neighbors and the wide world than the culture of the Empire generally allows.

One thing that we have definitely accomplished is that we eat very well. While statistically our cash income might count us among the impoverished, our gardens and flocks provide for us luxuries that the wealthiest might envy. We take for granted I confess, some of the finest food on earth, including fresh goats’ milk for most of the year, yogurt and a variety of cheeses, herbs, vegetables, the eggs of free range chickens, horseradish that brings tears to the eyes! All this and more in return for moderate labor but very little cash. “Come and buy, not for money, not for a price. Why spend money and get what is not bread?” God invites through the prophet Isaiah, (55:1-2) “why give the price of your labor and go unsatisfied? Only listen to me and you will have good food to eat and you will enjoy the fat of the land!”

One staple that we grow that takes up a large patch of our garden as well as our labor and time is the dried bean crop, pintos and black beans. We brought the seeds with us from the gardens of our previous home at the Catholic Worker House in Davenport, Iowa, the biggest beans saved each year as seeds to plant the next and we like to think that, ala Gregor Mendel, we are over time developing a genetic strain of bean most ideally suited to the climate and soil of southern Iowa. As nitrogen fixing legumes, beans also provide for natural fertilization of the soil. Few neighbors here culti-

vate dried beans, though green bean varieties are popular in gardens and soy beans along with corn make up most of the industrial monoculture agribusiness that surrounds us. Our bean pods seen drying on the vine are, I suspect, accounted by passersby as green beans we were just too lazy or distracted to pick at the right time.

I was once showing off our garden to an old friend, and she asked me why we bothered with the beans. Garden tomatoes, peppers, carrots, she pointed out, are inestimably better tasting than the pale, insipid imitations found at the store. But beans are beans and even good organic ones can be purchased for pennies a pound. “Don’t you have more important things you could be doing with your time?” she asked.

My friend asked a good question, one for which I had no immediate answer and one that I am still pondering many years later.

The whole process of planting, cultivating, harvesting, threshing and winnowing beans by hand is definitely labor intensive. I sometimes have wondered what the heck I am doing, stomping on the dried shattering pods in our kids’ wading pool or pouring the beans and chaff over and over from one bucket to another as the breeze carries away the chaff leaving the beans, fine dust permeating every pore. Also, we cannot make any claim at purity or consistency here in Maloy. We buy many things we have no business having and often, often, we yield to convenience and fancy before principle and responsibility. Besides this, we are busy with many other important works, organizing to end war not the least. So, why DO we keep planting beans?

There is a gnawing question behind the question my friend asked, a basic unspoken assumption. This assumption insists first that there is something more important for us to be about than the cultivation of beans. Beans, of course, are important, this assumption goes, but the work is tedious and less than “cost effective” so why not pay someone else to do it for me? Getting someone poorer than I am to grow my beans would free my time for higher things, someone with fewer choices than I, someone with less education, without my citizenship status. Perhaps someone (let’s face it) with darker skin than mine. Someone

who has little choice but to work for next to nothing, because if those who grow beans were paid a fair wage for their work, well, I certainly could not afford to pay what a pound of beans would cost then, could I? This assumption says, too, that what I, and people like me, would do with the time freed from the tedium of processing dried beans, our leisure, our hobbies, family time, addictions, our passions and causes, matter more than those of the people who would otherwise be doing that work for us if we were not doing it ourselves.

There is a certain amount of manual labor that simply must be done for the running of the world and to be fair all of us must do some of it, whatever else it is we find to fill the rest of our time. This is the only way that all people will have the time justly theirs to rest, to think, to create. Along with “Houses of Hospitality to give to the rich the opportunity to serve the poor,” Peter Maurin prescribed that the Catholic Worker establish “Farming Communes where the scholars may become workers so the workers may be scholars.”

Early Benedictines were busy about saving a remnant of civilization in that other dark age, but these brilliant scholars, scribes, musicians, philosophers and scientists were abjured in their *Rule* not to be resentful if at harvest time they were needed to put down their pens and books and go out in the field to help bring in the crops. “Let them not be discontented; for then are they truly monks when they live by the labor of their hands.” (*Rule of St Benedict*, Chap. 46) No one is absolved from the commandment to live by the sweat of one’s brow (Genesis, 3:17). “We need Communes,” Maurin insisted, “to substitute a technique of ideals for our technique of deals.” Maybe there is no more important work on earth for us to be about than the cultivation of beans.

We who work and struggle for peace and an end to war need to remember that we are looking to the reign of justice where, as Isaiah envisions, “the people will build houses and live to inhabit them, plant vineyards and eat their fruit; they shall not build for others to inhabit nor plant for others to eat. God’s chosen will enjoy the fruit of their labor, they shall not toil in vain or raise children for misfortune” (Isaiah 65:21-22).



Massacre of the Innocents, Giotto di Bondone, 1315

## Feast of the Holy Innocents Retreat, Witness and Line Crossing

**T**he Des Moines and Omaha Catholic Worker communities invite you to deepen your Christmas observance and join us as we examine an often-ignored element of the season. Taking cues from the Gospel of Matthew’s infant narrative; we will study the parallels between King Herod’s first-century killing of the innocent children in Bethlehem and the murderous acts committed by twenty-first-century Herods in the U.S. The Herods of Jesus’s day carried out their deeds through their command of legionary Roman armies. Modern-day Herods employ the U.S. Global Military presence and Offutt’s Nuclear and Space Commands.

This year’s retreat takes place in the basement of St John’s Church on Creighton University campus at 2500 California Plaza, Omaha. The Retreat begins at 7:00 pm Friday, December 26, 2008, and concludes Sunday, December 28 with a 10 a.m. Mass at St. John’s followed by the Witness and Line Crossing at Offutt Air Force Base. For information contact Frank Cordaro.

When peace breaks out around the world, people living and working free of oppression and debt on their own land will grow food to feed themselves and their families rather than cash crops to feed us as they are forced to do now. They will not be coerced any longer into our fields and factories to give us the cheap stuff we depend upon. What then, shall we do but plant, harvest, thresh and winnow beans?

Why do we grow beans in Maloy? After more than thirty years with the Catholic Worker in city and in country, I am convinced that all we do is but a gesture and a prayer for the better future for which we hope but can only glimpse from afar. What else is even the largest soup kitchen in the face of mas-

sive hunger and poverty? How can protests, sit-ins, marches, even our jail sentences begin to meet the challenge of rampant militarism and nuclear madness? But we do these things because, insufficient as they are, there is not much else to do. So here in Maloy we take time from our other important labors to grow beans, mostly because it is what we are used to but also, I hope, to take up a tiny piece of the responsibility that is ours to make a world where each person lives without fear, where each of us does our fair share of the work that needs done and each enjoys our fair share of the fruits of our labor.

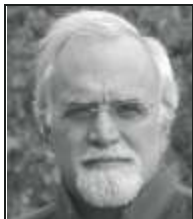
*Brian Terrell, director of Catholic Peace Ministry in Des Moines, lives in the Strangers and Guests Catholic Worker Community in Maloy, Iowa.*



Brian Terrell, Mona Shaw, Frank Cordaro, and former Des Moines Catholic Worker and Iowa City photographer Mauro Heck at the Sugar Creek retreat in September.



## Why remember the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?



by Frank Cordaro

The annual Hiroshima and Nagasaki Vigil took place August 6-9, 2008, at the main gate of Offutt Air Force Base, and the home of STRATCom, bringing representatives from four different Catholic Worker communities--Des Moines, Omaha, Chicago, and Yankton.

Throughout the vigil people kept asking us why it's so important to keep remembering the A-bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The hardest thing to do in this country is to see and know the truth about our nation's role in the world. Most Americans tragically believe the national mythology and lies that prop up our Global Empire, an Empire that is maintained militarily through the mission of STRATCom at Offutt AFB.

Most Americans are taught to believe we have a moral duty to police the world and that without the US on the scene, the nations of the world could not maintain the peace and stability necessary to keep the "global economy" going. From this US perspective the global economy, with its deficiencies, is a good thing for all the peoples of the world and far better than any other alternative. In fact the people who run this country and its global corporations believe the global economy is the best way to bring democracy to the remaining undemocratic nations in the world like China. And, if the global economy doesn't work, the second best way to promote democracy is through the war, as in Iraq today.

That is why Americans are willing to maintain our global military presence in more than 100 countries at an annual cost higher than all other national military budgets combined! And, that is why the primary mission of STRATCom is its global strike directive, by putting together the ele-

ments of the former US Space Command with new missions for near-space, StratCom in essence "manages the planet" by using all space-based intelligence satellites, navigation satellites, and communication satellites ready to support first-strike military operations against any country at any time within minutes. If and when we go to war with Iran, it will be run out of Offutt AFB and STRATCom.

The lies layered upon lies that prop up the national mythology that maintains our Global Empire rests upon a primary lie. This first lie upon which the hold whole narrative rests is found in our understanding of our role in World War II. Most American's have come to believe that WW II was the quintessential "just war," and that we saved the world from the madness of Adolf Hitler and the tyranny of Fascism. After WWII we quickly condemned the war crimes of our enemies but never took the time to own up to our own war crimes.

The emblematic events upon which our national WWII illusions rest are the A-bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For us to maintain the lie that we were the good guys during WWII and maintain to this day a moral duty to police the world we had to sanitize our A-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Immediately after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki the US claimed that the bombings of these two cities saved both American and Japanese lives and that the bombings ended the war. Whether or not these claims are true—and we do not believe they are—the fact remains that with the A-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki we killed 165 thousand innocent civilians outright and tens of thousands in the weeks, months and years to follow. The cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had no military targets that merited such bombings.

If ever there were a textbook war crime in the 20th

*continued on page 7*

## Another War Story

by Mona Shaw

After weeks of unspeakable negligence, seriously wounded, Army soldier Michael Hervey was finally told he'd be moved to a hospital in Germany. The news was really another stalemate. In order to be actually, physically moved, the Army required that Michael take his gear with him. Retrieving gear while in the hospital is a bureaucratic nightmare. It can take weeks and months for that detail to be satisfied. Michael was prepared to wait through another series of indeterminate delays, but the next day Army soldier, Ryan Kohler showed up at his bed with his gear.

"How did this get here so fast?" Michael asked Kohler, "Did the doctor or someone push it? Did the supply clerk put through a requisition?"

"No," said Kohler, "Your mom called."

Brenda Hervey's ability to get medical attention for her step-son, Michael is a simultaneous lesson in triumph and tragedy. The triumph is her courage and persistence. The tragedy is help did not come from those who should have helped.

It did not come from the military or the military medical machine that constantly referred her to bureaucracy after bureaucracy. It did not come from state or federal legislators—whom Brenda contacted constantly—in Iowa or New York. Staff in Harkin's, Schumer's and Clinton's offices took the information, but never got back to her. The rest ignored her altogether. It did not come from any public proponent of the war, or any conservative faction waving a "Support the Troops" banner. Moreover, it did not come from Hollywood stars ubiquitously on the front-lines of celebrity anti-war marches.

Brenda Hervey's help came from the father of a son also stationed in Iraq. Via her own investigation, Hervey stumbled across Military Families Speak Out, a grass-roots group comprised only of real peo-



The USS Fiske shortly after it was torpedoed Aug. 2, 1944; 32 on board, including my uncle, Harold W. Shaw, were killed.

ple with real loved ones who are really affected by the war. She found a friend in Tim Kahlor, who contacted his son, Ryan; and it was Ryan who went out of his way to procure and deliver Michael's gear.

How has it come to be that the sum of all the most powerful resources in the most powerful nation in the world could not get Michael Hervey to the hospital, but two men, already sacrificing far more than their share, were the ones who could and did? This is a reality and tragedy so fraught with deceit and betrayal that it is too much for most Americans to more than superficially acknowledge.

There is a sea of pain here that is so wide and deep that angels gulp and doubt whether eternity provides time to cross it. Each bleak and aching wave whispers the obvious question, "When will the pain matter?"

More specifically, the question is, "Whose pain matters?" The flat reality is that most Americans awaken each morning with no reflexive, visceral twinge over the war. Even most anti-war advocates will admit, when honest, they've never been startled from sleep because of it.

I imagine the frustration and fear woven through all the details slicing at Brenda Hervey's heart and mind. I imagine her ear numb from holding on the phone, I imagine her stifling tears or anger as she writes down one more number or name. I see her walking a floor or rocking back and forth on a chair as she waits for a call back or pushes through a sleepless night. Eating something, drinking something, ignoring something, doing or not doing something as sunset after sunset bleeds into sunrise after sunrise; each delivering more questions than answers.

I imagine rows of beds as she walks into the hospital in Germany. I imagine white sheets tie-dyed with pink, orange, yellow and brown stains and hybrid smells of medicine and waste of things human and

inhuman. I think of the hallways of suffering she must pass through storing all those beloveds, and some not beloved enough, in chairs or on carts, before she can wrap her arms around her own beloved son.

And more painfully, far more painfully, I realize she is luckier than many in this sea. And, because I am far too human, I imagine something else.

A flash of bright yellow in my mother's arms comes through a sunny open door. This is a memory. And, I remember what happens next. My mother places the sunny newborn baby in the yellow blanket on my lap, and, because it is my fifth birthday, she tells me she is my birthday present. The baby is rosy beige, and her eyes and fists are clenched. I slip my finger through a cluster of hers and believe she intends to grip me. I ask about the dried, brown, stem-looking thing on her belly, and as my mother explains it to me, the baby opens her eyes and stares into me.

"Is she really mine?" I ask in utter wonder.

"As long as you take good care of her," our mother answers.

She is fifty now, my baby sister, and she is a chief petty officer on the USS Stennis, which is positioned in the middle of the Persian Gulf. She is a mechanic, and she repairs war planes. She (who is in a position to know) and others (who are not in a position to know) tell me she is "relatively" safe in this war. It is that word, "relatively," that haunts me throughout these days. If she is "relatively" safe then she must also be "relatively" in danger. No matter who else says what else, I cannot not know this; and I can't stand it. I can't take care of her. I can't even know what her days are like there, because she cannot tell me. I only know she has seen the planes she has repaired take off with bombs and come back without them. And, because I know her to be compassionate and

*continued on page 7*



Standing at the gate to Offutt Air Force Base on August 9, 2008.



## Another War Story

*continued from page 6*

kind, I also fear what this is doing, and has done, to her heart and mind as well as what it may do to her body.

And, I know for a certainty that families never recover when a loved one is killed in war. Because, after my uncle Harold was killed in WWII, his mother, father, sisters, and brothers never did.

Sooner, rather than later, I will hear another dismissive shrug of "That's how war is." I don't deconstruct this response because it may tell me something I don't want to know. It may tell me that there is no story wrenching enough to motivate a sufficient review of our collective compliance with the persistence of this war. There may be no story that will nudge even those who are academically opposed to the war to risk anything to stop it.

Other questions and comments and questions I hear hit me harder.

"At least you don't have a child there."

"Are you sure you're not using your sister to justify your politics?"

"Are you sure your activism isn't driven by your own family's self-interest?"

Like all words that hurt, the pain comes from a grain of truth they may hold. So I, like others, twist myself into a walking-illustration of the Kubler-Ross theory.

I deny. I deny her danger. I put my personal concerns away and in perspective. I organize or help others organize efforts against the war. I tell myself to not worry about my sister, she's probably going to be okay. I read; I write; and I write. I write letters or emails or essays to Congress, to online forums, to the Editor, to other activists, to anyone I think might care.

I bargain. If I work hard enough to stop the war, if I care enough about the pain

of others affected by the war; my sister will be okay. I spend every spare dime I have to stop the war. I go to Washington—a number of times. I go to Ft. Benning. I go to Tuskegee, Alabama, and sleep in a pew in a place where Dr. King preached. I upload a chart of Iowans in the military who have been killed in Iraq on a website. There are thirty-seven names, and each name I type tears me apart. I feel guilty because I do not feel grief enough. There is no escape from this guilt because I cannot remain sane and take in the endless grief wrought by each name.

I deny, and I bargain. This is familiar. I've done this before. I was an indefatigable AIDS activist in the 1980s-90s to keep my life-long, soul-mate, and HIV-infected friend Michael alive—an endless parade of demonstrations in Iowa, Chicago, D.C., and other places, symposia, lobby days, the Quilt, and a countless number of funerals of other friends who owned less of a chunk of my heart than Michael, and all their mothers, sobbing near my neck. Michael still died, but I refuse to weigh this history in this mix.

When I tell a woman I've known for years of Brenda and Michael's story, she says, "That's rough, but at least it's only her step-son."

I am angry. I am very angry. I am sick of everyone who is sick of hearing about it. I am angry at everyone who isn't angry about this too. I am angry that ending this war has evaporated as a remote possibility to expect from national leadership in this nation.

I am angriest at myself. Adjoining the sea of pain is a bottomless reservoir of class bigotry, racism, rationalizations, excuses, dismissals, and apathy that feeds this sea. After all these years of dog-paddling

in this reservoir, I have yet to find a way to drain it or even siphon off a little of its poison. Instead I watch its bacteria gurgle and grow like the immense, lethal vat of toxic waste it is.

"At least" have become the passwords for inaction.

"At least" we live in a country where you can complain.

"At least" the women in Iraq got to vote.

"At least," it's only her step son.

How much pain is enough before we'll do something? How close does the relative have to be? How horrible their stories? I consider telling all of them to "Go to hell," if only as a method to bring them into the same room where we are. The foaming waste fills my nose and eyes and ears. It's in my mouth and strains through my teeth and burns my throat and tongue. "At least" I'm not swallowing it.

I'm angry even though I know anger is a particular problem because it's the ultimate indictment that grants permission to dismiss the suffering. E.g. "I can't listen to them because they have so much anger." And I have my own list of "at leasts."

At least one act of Congress should be about ending this war.

At least one member of the Bush administration should have to legally answer for this war.

At least we should be willing to sacrifice as much—our jobs, our wealth, our status, our lives—to end this war as what is being taken from those we send to fight it.

I will not even consider acceptance. I cannot accept one more year of this outrage or one more needless death because of it. I cannot accept elected leadership that cares more about the next election than the next orphaned child or



grieving mother (or father or grandmother or grandfather, or sister). I cannot accept a citizenry that will accept leadership that accepts this. I need to believe we are waking up to our obligation as responsible citizens and as decent human beings. I need to believe growing numbers of dissent will soon explode in every corner of human experience, that truth and justice will win, and that this travesty will end. Soon.

*Since I wrote this column two years ago, 1,981 more military personnel have been killed in Iraq, 655 more in Afghanistan, and 14 more Iowans. I've joined dozens more peace*

*actions and been arrested in these six times. The number of family members in all the nations involved whose hearts have been irrevocably broken number in the millions.*

*My sister, now 52, did return from sea duty in the Gulf only to be sent back to a ground assignment in Iraq for her fifth war deployment. She is scheduled to return home June, 2009. The war not only continues, it is surging, and both major party candidates promise to escalate the death and destruction. We will not vote away this war. Those with functional hearts and breathing souls will make the necessary sacrifices to stand up and resist it.*

## Why remember the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

*continued from page 6*

century, (a century of many war crimes) it was the A-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A war crime is not determined by the results that may or may not result. A war crime rests upon the deed itself, not its alleged outcome. By the legal standards of what constitutes a war crime and the treaties to which the US were signatories during WWII, these bombings were war crimes.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki are not our only crimes against humanity. Our history of slavery and our treatment of Native Americans still loom as unresolved national sins.

What makes Hiroshima and Nagasaki important is that our denial of their criminality and insistence of their necessity to the end WWII rationalize our global empire building and the consequent unjust, immoral and illegal acts of US foreign policy these 60 years since. The Iraq war being the most recent of these debacles.

If we are to dismantle our global empire and the global military complex that

supports this empire—and for which STRATCom does its bidding—we need genuine conversion and change of heart as a nation. We need to reinvent a national narrative that will bring us back into the family of nations working together with other nations for the betterment of all people, not just ourselves and our friends, and not just the rich and the powerful. The first step to any true conversion is repentance, the ownership of our national sins and a resolve to make amends. The first sin and lie that props up our global empire and global military complex is the denial of the criminality of our A-bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

That is why we return to Offutt AFB and STRATCom every year to vigil from August 6-9. To repent. To repent our desires for empire and global military domination, to repent our decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki, confess our commission of war crimes in these bombings, make amends for these crimes, and resolve never to do this again.

## Film and Discussion Series

On selected Saturdays during the fall, we are hosting a series of discussions and film screenings. The films and the discussions are held at the Berrigan house, 713 Indiana Ave., Des Moines., and begin at 7:30 p.m. Free, and all are welcome. For more information, call, 515-282-4781, or go to our website.

### Discussions

**Should faith and politics mix?**

*October 25, 2008*

**Is Capitalism Immoral?**

*November 29, 2008*

**Were the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki justified?**

*December 20, 2008*



### Films

**Jesus Camp**

*October 18, 2008*

**The Corporation**

*November 1, 2008*

**White Light, Black Rain**

*December 6, 2008*

Des Moines Catholic Worker

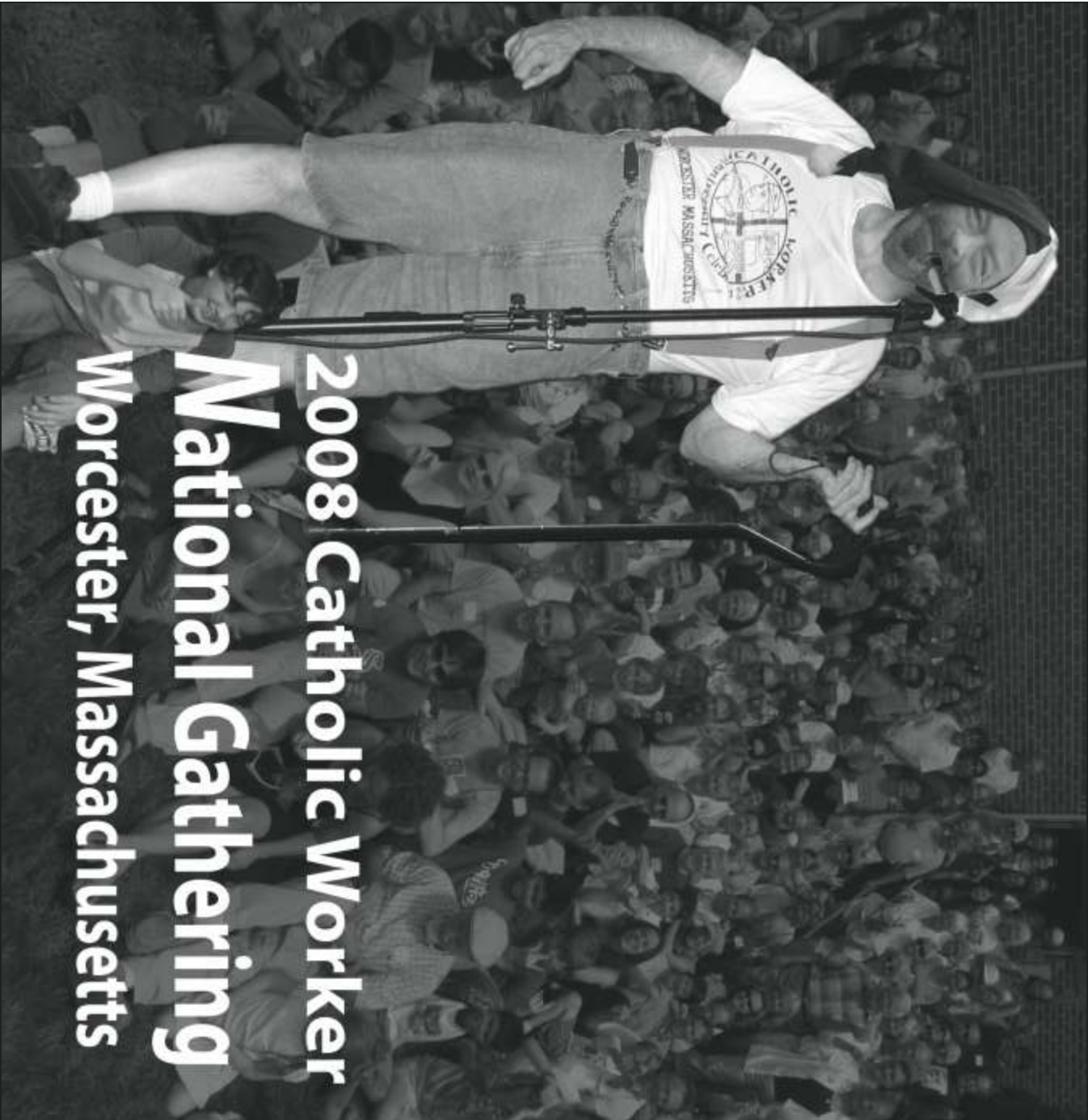
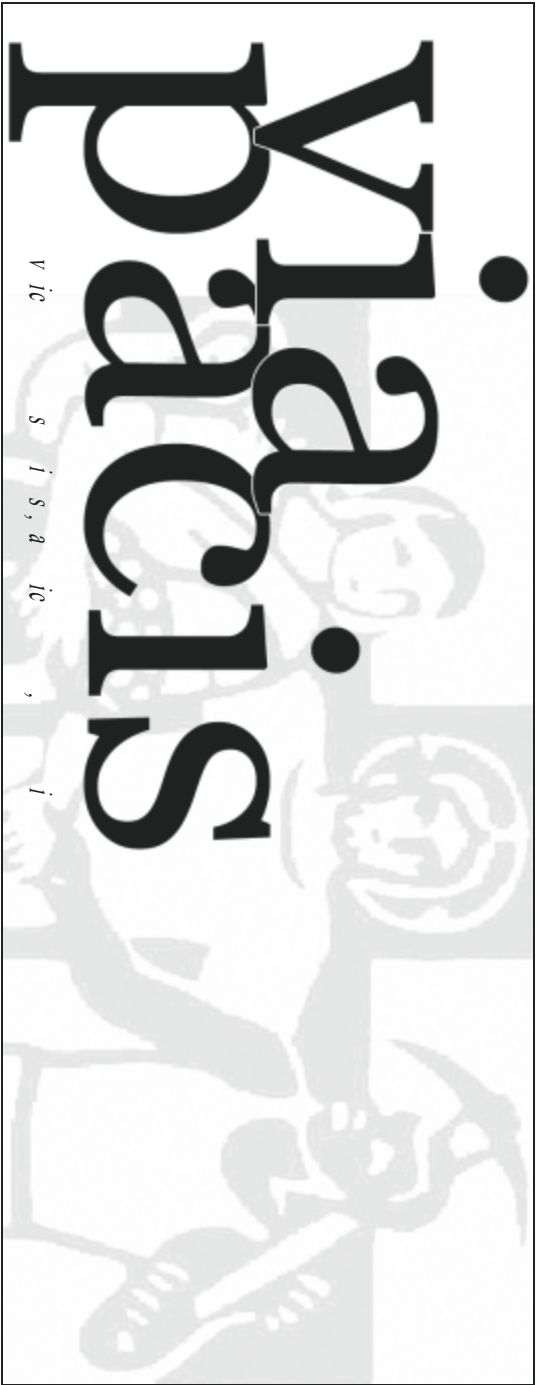
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Without, your prayers and goodwill, nothing else matters.	Cereal Coffee Fruit Vegetables Beans Meat and Fish Soups and Stews	Tylenol Ibuprofen Multiple Vitamins Ointment Disinfectants Band-Aids	Bleach Laundry Detergent Dish Soap Murphy's Oil Soap Pinesol Toilet Cleaners	Underwear T-shirts Towels Blankets Sheets Pillows Socks	Individuals and work crews for hospitality (serving food, clean-up), cleaning and general inside and outside maintenance.	Cash donations are essential to pay taxes, utilities, repair and maintenance bills and to purchase supplies.
	Sugar and artificial sweetener Coffee Creamer Juices Milk Cheese Butter or Margarine Eggs Salt and pepper Salaad dressing and condiments	Feminine Hygiene Items Disposable Razors Shaving Cream Shampoo and Conditioner Lotion Deodorant Toothbrushes Toothpaste Toilet Paper	Disinfectant Paper Towels Sponges Trash bags Aluminum foil Brooms Rugs Floor mats Candles Light bulbs			
Peace and justice books and videos are always welcome donations for the Berrigan House Library.						
<div><div>Renovation Help</div><div>Do-it-yourselfers, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, etc. are needed to help with:</div><div><div><div>Dingman House</div><div>All new kitchen</div><div>Fire Escape</div><div>Basement</div></div><div><div>Lazarus House</div><div>New Roof</div><div>Fire Escape</div><div></div></div><div><div>Ligutti House</div><div>Fire Escape</div><div>Basement</div><div></div></div></div><div>Plus major foundation repair in Berrigan, Dingman, and Ligutti. With four old houses, there is always something to repair or improve. Bring your tools and pick a project.</div></div>						



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